

\$4.50 / APRIL 2012

FOREIGN SERVICE

JOURNAL

THE MAGAZINE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS



FAMILY MEMBER EMPLOYMENT

The Search for Meaningful Overseas Work

The University of (fill in the blank)

Moving every two to three years in the Foreign Service is a rather nontraditional way of life, unless you are a nomad. However, recently it occurred to me that this life is very similar to something a little more prosaic — going to college. The main difference is that in the transient expat life, instead of going to university once, we do it over and over again.

There are many similarities, both social and academic, between the Foreign Service life and university. When we went off to college, we often didn't know a soul. The same can be said for almost every post. There may be a few people we encountered earlier in our careers; but most likely, we arrive not knowing anyone.

Despite having done our homework, we arrive without much of a clue. Although we may have read about the place and what it has to offer, it is only when our boots hit the ground that we are able to figure out how everything fits together.

As the years at post pass, just as they do at university, we move from being clueless, disconnected freshmen into the ranks of upper-classmen, where we generally have the situation down pat and are woven into a tapestry of community and social life.

Being at post is comparable to university academically, as well. Just as we had to select a major at school, something on which to focus our intellectual attention, many of us do something similar at post. For Foreign Service members, their major is proscribed for them by their jobs. But many family members actually get to choose their majors.

For example, here in Brussels, Robbin Zeff Warner is well on her way to graduating magna cum



TERRIE VERHELEN

Peter Barbarich, a family member in Brussels, finds his true calling chiseling sculpture from local wood.



GENE WARNER

Robbin Zeff Warner creates chocolates molded into a variety of shapes when she isn't teaching others the joy of Belgian chocolate-making.

laude in chocolate. Belgium is the perfect place for such a major, as it boasts three of the world's largest chocolate manufacturers, and is home to more than 10,000 artisan chocolate shops dotted around the country.

Warner spent her first couple of years exploring Brussels before settling on learning all she could about making chocolates. Now she has moved on to offering courses teaching others how to take raw chocolate, temper it and mold it into a variety of shapes.

"Finding out I loved working with chocolate was a process of discovery," says Robbin. "I'd been dabbling in this, sampling a little of that, until I took a professional chocolate-making course at the Chocolate Academy at Callebaut and was officially hooked. When we go back to the States, I am seri-

ously considering doing this for a living.”

Another member of the Brussels community, Peter Barbarich, has decided to major in sculpture. When he first arrived, he spent a lot of time being a househusband when he wasn't exercising and getting into shape. After a while, however, he wanted something more. So, pursuing a lifelong passion, he signed up for a few art courses at the Rhok Academy of 3D Arts. He now focuses on learning as much as he can about the art and science of sculpture.

“I've been working with stone, wood and metal, and found this amazing

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teacher,” Peter says. “In real life I am a scientist, but sculpture is my true calling.”

Whether we commit ourselves to a major, or continue to dabble in electives, every new post is akin to going to the University of Belgium, Italy, or Uganda, or wherever it is we are located, then on to the next one.

What a wonderful opportunity this is. Spending one's life learning about new and interesting people and places, over and over again. Though rather nontraditional, I can think of no better way to spend my brief time on this planet.

So, what's your major? □

Douglas E. Morris is the partner of a Foreign Service officer assigned to Brussels. He serves as the editor of the tri-mission newsletter and has published eight travel guides, including the latest revision to his book, Open Road's Best of Italy, to be released this month.

This Month in Diplomatic History: Thomas Jefferson

BY GREG NAARDEN

Thomas Jefferson, born on April 13, 1743, was the third U.S. president, the second U.S. minister plenipotentiary to France and the first U.S. Secretary of State. Yet while Jefferson was the first of six future presidents who would hold the nation's highest diplomatic office, he did not regard his work in foreign affairs as among his seminal achievements. His epitaph, which he authored, reads: “Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom and father of the University of Virginia.”

While giving the country its founding document and today's Atlantic Coast Conference a solid performer in a variety of sports, are certainly historic achievements, what was his legacy to the Department of State?

In 1790, when Jefferson reluctantly became Secretary of State, the department had a skeleton staff of just four clerks, one translator and a messenger. Together with President George Washington, they lobbied Congress to fund the department's operations and increase the number of diplomatic posts abroad. As a result, by 1792 the U.S. had 16 diplomatic and consular outposts, mostly in Europe.

Jefferson requested that diplomatic representatives write regular dispatches about “such political and commercial intelligence as you may think interesting to the United States,” and any information about “military preparations and other indications of war.” He divided the department into a diplomatic service, which was responsible for political work; and the consular service, which handled commercial and American citizen services. This division remained in effect until 1924, when the Rogers Act merged the two services.

Despite his years in Paris, and his affinity for the French, Jefferson did not like the formality that typified European diplomatic services. He did not adhere to rigid standards of protocol, and he promoted the tra-

When Jefferson reluctantly assumed his position as Secretary of State, the department had a skeleton staff of just four clerks, one translator and a messenger.

dition of American representatives wearing unpretentious clothing. While khakis and a blue Oxford shirt may not have been available at the time, the fact that Americans were outdressed by their European counterparts was appropriate, given the ethic of the country.

Funding consular operations from user fees began under Jefferson. Consuls at 18th-century American diplomatic outposts did not receive salaries. They supported themselves through the fees they charged or through business ventures. When Congress finally began paying them salaries in 1856, consuls were no longer permitted to engage in outside business activities, but they continued to finance operations through user fees.

In 1790, the department had a substantial number of domestic duties, including communicating federal legislation to the states. Jefferson's tenure as Secretary of State was marked by internal political battles, particularly with Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton. He was unable to conclude treaties to resolve conflicts with England or Spain and finally, in 1793, stepped down from his position.

At the same time, he increased the country's diplomatic representation abroad, implemented a system of reporting that remains a core Foreign Service function and established diplomatic traditions that represented the new country's proletarian ethic. □

Greg Naarden, an FSO since 2004, is a member of the FSJ Editorial Board and Friends of the USDC, a support group for the U.S. Diplomacy Center (diplomacy.state.gov).